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## Reagan Warned of Instability in Mexico

**T**he Central Intelligence Agency has told President Reagan that there is at least a 1-in-5 chance that the Mexican government will collapse within the next five years. This alarming judgment was delivered to the White House two years ago, but our CIA sources tell us that, if anything, it was an optimistic appraisal. In the last two years, they pointed out, Mexico's problems have grown by quantum leaps as the price of oil has fallen and charges of election fraud have hit the headlines.

The prediction of possible disaster was contained in a classified National Intelligence Estimate, the most important appraisal of a country that the intelligence community provides a president.

The 35-page estimate began: "The Mexican political system is under greater stress today than at any time under the last 30 years. Ultimately, of course, the preservation of Mexico's stability will rest on the skill and competence of its leaders and on the strength of its political fabric."

It continued: "We judge that in the end the Mexican political system is likely to remain intact." Then came the kick in the pants:

"But the majority of the intelligence community principals also judge there is roughly a 1-in-5 chance that during the period of this estimate—through the remainder of President [Miguel] de la Madrid's term, which ends in 1988, and the first few years after his successor is scheduled to take office—centrifugal forces now at work within the system, combined with internal political opposition and perhaps external pressure, will result in the political destabilization of Mexico."

Because the estimates represent the view of all U.S. intelligence agencies, dissent is noted. In the case of the prediction of Mexico's collapse, the majority of the "intelligence community principals" agreed, but five representatives disagreed with the CIA's pessimistic opinion.

Among those who agreed were CIA Director William J. Casey; Lt. Gen. Lincoln Faurer, then-director of the National Security Agency; Rear Adm. John L. Butts, then-chief of naval intelligence, and the Treasury Department's intelligence unit.

Disagreeing were Lt. Gen. James A. Williams, Defense Intelligence Agency boss; Hugh Montgomery, head of the State Department's intelligence and research bureau; Gen. William E. Odom, Maj. Gen. James Pfautz and Brig. Gen. Larry Smith, the intelligence chiefs of the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps, respectively. All five have since moved on to other jobs.

The dissenters' view was given at length: "While Mexico will experience increased political instability associated with extremely difficult social and economic problems, the probability that these conditions will reach the extreme of political destabilization during the period of this estimate is remote . . . ."

"The complete political destabilization of Mexico would require an extremely well-organized opposition with dedicated leaders capable of challenging one of the most durable and resilient political systems in Latin America." The dissenters felt this was unlikely in the near future.